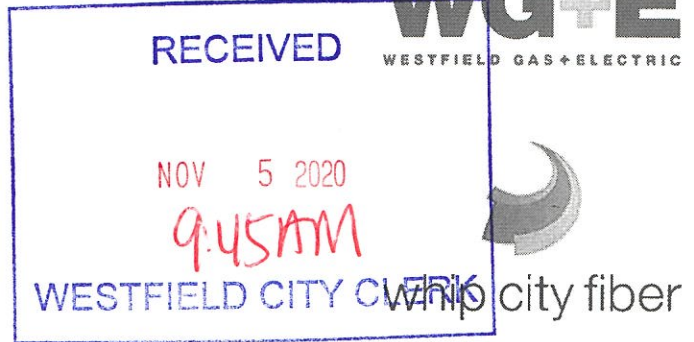


Westfield Gas & Electric Municipal Light Board Regular Meeting Minutes October 7, 2020



Location: Gas & Electric Operations Center, 40 Turnpike Industrial Rd. Conference Room, Westfield, MA

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

I. Call to Order

Chairman Sacco stated that this meeting of the Municipal Light Board is being electronically recorded in both video and audio by the Municipal Light Board. As stated in the WG+E MLB Video Policy the recording will be available on the WG+E website within one week. Is anyone, other than the Municipal Light Board, recording the meeting and if so state whether it is an audio or video recording and whether the recording is being live streamed. Peter Carrier of the Westfield News, who was in attendance remotely, indicated he was not recording. Chairman Sacco also stated a call-in number was provided for this meeting, however excluding emergency events, this will be the last month a call-in number is planned to be used.

II. ROLL CALL was taken as follows:

Present:

Ward #1 Commissioner, Kevin M. Kelleher
Ward #2 Commissioner, Ray Rivera
Ward #3 Commissioner, Dawn Renaudette
Ward #4 Commissioner, Francis L. Liptak
Ward #6 Commissioner, Robert C. Sacco
Ward #5 Commissioner, Thomas P. Flaherty
Appointed Commissioner, A. Edward Roman

Absent:

Present: 7 Absent: 0

III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

IV. READING OF THE RECORD:

On motion by Commissioner Flaherty, seconded by Commissioner Renaudette, it was voted unanimously:

VOTED: To accept the minutes of the September 2, 2020 Regular Session Meeting of the Municipal Light Board as presented; and

To accept the minutes of the September 2, 2020 Executive Session Meeting of the Municipal Light Board as presented, but not release to the public at this time.

V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: Superintendent of Schools Stefan Czaprowski spoke to the MLB regarding the needs of the schools in the area of technology. The Superintendent indicated it was a challenge to open the schools within the guidelines provided by the State Department of Education, CDC and others. Only half the students are allowed in the building at a time. Considering the other half of the students are remotely learning, the schools and students need internet access in order to participate in the remote learning experience. He expects this remote education will be for the entire year and estimates the cost to be \$42,500. He wanted to thank General Manager Contrino and WG+E who contributed \$10,000 already towards the \$42,500 and intends to match up to an additional \$5,000 of funds raised. He also thanked Brian Sullivan, former Mayor of Westfield, who has organized an ongoing fundraiser that has received \$9,380 to date. He further indicated that some parents have lost their jobs and cannot afford internet. While it was indicated that hot spots were offered previously by WG+E, but the hot spot idea could result in too many students in a confined area and, as the time, proved unattractive. The Superintendent also thanked WG+E for getting the schools some needed equipment as well, for which WG+E donated nearly \$4,000. Chairman Sacco asked if \$50,000 would cover the costs to the end of the school year. The Superintendent indicated it would as long as no further requests come into the School Department.

Brian Sullivan of 12 Sherwood Avenue then spoke and indicated that when he learned \$250 per low-income household was needed to provide internet access he started his fundraising efforts. Mr. Sullivan expressed his gratitude for what WG+E has done to date and further indicated that any funds received would be earmarked for WPS technology only. A separate gift fund has been established. Commissioner Flaherty indicated that back in June the City Council and the School Committee came to the WG+E and asked for funds to close up the budget gap and asked what the current budget gap is as of now. The Superintendent indicated that he has cut \$2.5 million from the budget and that appears to be okay for this academic year. He further indicated that some parents are opting for home schooling and not sending their kids to school. State aid is based on the number of students as of October of the previous year. If those students come back next year the School Department will be short funds for next year's budget. Chairman Sacco asked if the match was better than a contribution. Brian Sullivan indicated a gift is a better alternative. The Manager noted that the School Committed is now halfway to its goal.

The Chairman asked if there were any objections to move the new business agenda item IX a) to this discussion in that it was already being discussed during public participation. There were no objections.

Commission Flaherty indicated that he had previously spoken with Brian Sullivan and it appears that the schools need about \$50,000 with WG+E already contributing \$15,000. An additional \$35,000 still to be contributed. He stated the City is no longer seeking \$1M from the WG+E and would propose an additional contribution of \$35,000.

Commission Sacco stated he is in favor of the WPS' request. He was happy there was a solid ask that would have a tangible benefit to the students. Commissioner Renaudette indicated she has two children participating in remote learning in Westfield schools this year. The remote learning this fall is going very well and greatly improved from the spring. Commission Roman indicated 110% support of the motion. Commissioner Rivera stated it is good WG+E knows where the funds are being used and, if they are for students, he was in support of the motion. The Manager indicated that he would like some advertising and marketing within the schools as recognition of WG+E's contribution in order to justify the amount being contributed. Commissioner Rivera asked if WG+E could put the Adopt a Student Technology Fund program on its Facebook page and help the schools publicize that the need this money. Commissioner Renaudette inquired if there are data limits that the students or teachers are running into. The Superintendent indicated that there had been a problem but they switched to Verizon where there is unlimited data.

On motion by Commissioner Flaherty, seconded by Commissioner Liptak, it was unanimously voted:

VOTED: To contribute in addition to the \$15,000 already contributed an additional \$35,000 for the needs of the Adopt a Student Technology Fund as discussed.

VI. COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED BY GAS AND ELECTRIC:

- a) **Acknowledgement – Cummington Whip City Fiber Customer** – Email from Alan Weisman thanking WG+E for providing fiber-optic broadband to the Town of Cummington, along with the good and congenial service and invariably friendly and helpful staff. The customer was very complimentary of WG+E and its internet staff indicating that they had been without adequate internet in Cummington until Whip City Fiber was installed.
- b) **Acknowledgement – Genesis** – Letter from Liz Walz, Executive Director, thanking WG+E for its sponsorship of the 21st Annual Wine Taste Fundraiser. Such generosity helps them provide spiritual support and programming needed in the community.
- c) **Acknowledgement – Stanley Park** – Letter from Robert C. McKean, Managing Director, thanking WG+E for its donation. Such gift assists in the care and preservation of the Park.

- d) **Acknowledgement – Westfield Pickle Ball** – Email from Scott LaBombard thanking WG+E for its assistance in community projects. The latest being lights at the Pickleball courts at Municipal Park. Commissioner Flaherty asked that if the donation was labor only. Mike Lee, Operations Manager, indicated that WG+E provided the equipment and installed the lights.

VII. REPORTS FROM THE GAS & ELECTRIC:

A. Action Required Items

- a) **Preliminary 2021 MLB Schedule**. The Manager presented the proposed MLB schedule for 2021 and pointed out that the schedule is based on the MLB policy for meetings to be held on the first Wednesday of each month. The MLB discussed the schedule and the commission agreed to the proposed schedule.
- b) **Quarterly Powerline Publication**. The Manager discussed the Quarterly Powerline Publication which is being forwarded to customers in their October bills. The Powerline announced the annual Gas Energy Savings Credit Program available for customers to enroll in the program and reduce their weather-adjusted gas energy consumption by 10% during January, February and March of 2021 to be eligible for an energy credit. The Manager's letter highlighted the effects of the pandemic on everyone including WG+E operations. He also noted the debt-forgiveness program that had been authorized by the MLB and encouraged customers that are experiencing financial hardships to contact WG+E customer service. He noted the increase in electronic payments that have taken place. The construction projects around Westfield were highlighted and the Manager stated that progress is being made on Whip City Fiber and further expansion into new neighborhoods within Westfield. The rate comparison charts were also included in the PowerLine. The Manager further indicated that the Powerline is available online as well. The Powerline reminds customers to change the batteries in smoke and CO detectors. Further if their CO detector does go off to call WG+E. Commissioner Kelleher asked about the inspection of utility poles and in particular the impact of the drilled holes used for testing and if there could be a problem. Mr. Lee answered that there are no standards as to the pole testing. Once tested and treated, the holes are filled. Commissioner Liptak asked if Verizon is testing jointly owned poles. The Manager indicated that Verizon is paying its share of the pole inspections in its maintenance area.
- c) **Customer Satisfaction Survey Results**. The Manager reported that every two years, WG+E conducts a survey of customer satisfaction. Results are reviewed and used to influence future operational strategies. The 2020 Customer Satisfaction Survey was distributed to residential customers in July 2020. Surveys were mailed to each individual account holder with a postage-paid return envelope. Notification and a link to the survey was posted on the WG+E website and Facebook page and an email was sent to all customers for whom we have an email address. A total of 4,592 responses were received, over half of which were from customers who have been with us for more than 20 years. To encourage participation, all survey respondents who returned a paper survey were entered into a drawing to receive one \$100 energy credit off their

utility bill. Customers who completed their survey online were given increased chances of winning one of three \$100 energy credits. We continue to see a shift to completing the survey online which is good for ease of analysis and the cost savings of return postage. He further stated that overall, we can feel very good about WG+E's standing in the community. When asked how satisfied they were with WG+E, 96% of residential respondents were extremely or moderately satisfied. We will continue to educate the community about our hilltown partnerships as a small number of customers expressed frustration with this activity when fiber is not on their street at this time. The commercial customers' responses indicated an overall favorability rating of 91%, which is very good. Overall residential satisfaction rated high at 96%. Commissioner Renaudette called attention that around 34% of customers indicated they did not know about the fuel assistance program. The Manager indicated that this year he expects a much better response in that the Department is publicizing the new \$500,000 debt forgiveness program. The Chairman indicated that he would like this program to be publicized more on the WG+E website. He did note the recent vote of MLB with respect to assisting customers that are in need due to COVID-19 issue was on the website. Jay Kline indicated that after the first day the program was placed on the website a number of applications were received. The MLB members drew names of the survey respondents for the for a bill credit, the customers drawn were Alan Lieb of 20 Adams Street, JoAnne Farrell of 283 Russellville Road, Daniel Fisher of 141 Hubbard Street, Donna Johnston of 160 Hillside Road, Apartment 2, and Kevin Lebric, of 785 North Road.

- d) **LIHEAP Funds Request**. The General Manager presented a report relating to LIHEAP, the Salvation Army's Good Neighbor Energy, and WG+E's Westfield Warm programs which address the needs of low-income households eligible for fuel assistance within the City of Westfield. The Manager noted that during the winter of 2019/20, LIHEAP provided 862 Westfield families a total of \$661,963 of financial assistance towards their heating bills. WG+E provided 256 families additional assistance through our Westfield Warm program and a total of \$54,614 was distributed to eligible families through Westfield Warm. The Manager noted that any funding of the Westfield Warm Fund, which is supplemented to the already well funded LIHEAP program, is provided by the rest of the WG+E ratepayers. He also stated that the funding guidelines used by WG+E are sound and are consistent with the LIHEAP and Salvation Army fuel assistance programs. The Manager stated that this coming winter, the Westfield Warm program will be a subset of the larger \$500,000 debt forgiveness fund the MLB had voted to put in place.
- e) **Energy Outlook 2020/2021**. The Manager provided a PowerPoint presentation regarding the annual report of the 2020/2021 Energy Outlook. This report is an updated version of prior presentations given to the MLB (and placed on WG+E's website for public viewing) that highlights the effects of the lack of adequate gas transmission into the New England area along with the dramatic increased use of natural gas to generate electricity. The Manager indicated that New England delivered gas costs experienced last winter during peak demand periods were higher than the rest of the nation, yet much more contained than most recent winters. He stated that WG+E continues to utilize a risk management portfolio, control distribution expenses, invest in technology

and utilize hedging programs to control costs and keep rates stable. Commissioner Renaudette asked if there is more consumption with more people working from home. The Manager indicated residential consumption has increased and commercial usage has decreased. Commissioner Rivera inquired if there is any indication of increased consumption as businesses are coming back. Finance Manager Jay Kline indicated he does see some signs of increasing commercial consumption but nothing dramatic.

- f) **Coordinating with City Departments.** Operations Manager, Mike Lee, presented the report indicating that WG+E is a member of the City Board of Engineering and an active participant in the less formal weekly roundtable discussions. The City Roundtable Committee is comprised of representatives from various city departments, such as building, fire, community development, public works and water. In the past, meetings were held weekly. The new administration had temporarily postponed these meeting until the new Mayor decided to reconvene. The COVID outbreak has kept the group from meeting in person but the group is moving towards a Zoom meeting solution for the fall months. A list of topics covered was included within the report. Mike Lee indicated that there have been communications among the Departments to address any construction issues within the City. The Chairman asked if the lack of formal meetings has presented any problems. Mr. Lee indicated that at times there were occasions of short notice of City construction projects but there were no major issues.

- g) **NEPPA Joint Insurance Report.** Jay Kline, Finance and Business Manager, presented the NEPPA Joint Insurance purchasing report which shows an estimated annual savings by purchasing insurance through Public Utility Mutual Insurance Company (PUMIC) of approximately \$36,000 in 2020. The comparison was provided by PUMIC, based on general market inquiries. Major savings were in the area of Excess Liability Umbrella coverage and Public Officials/D&O. He explained how PUMIC has been a tremendous stabilizer for Westfield regarding insurance premiums and now has \$8M in capital, indicating its stability. He further stated that obtaining property coverage is becoming more difficult right now. There are 20 different carriers used to spread out the risk of the PUMIC program. It is likely the California fires and hurricanes that have occurred caused a number of property insurance companies to back away from offering the coverage. More self-insurance may be needed within the Department in the future.

- h) **Monthly Financial Reports.** Finance and Business Manager Jay Kline noted that the financials were in good shape relative to year end targets and monthly and year-to-date purchased power expenses and net income figures presented in this report reflect actual amounts. Through the month of August 2020, the Gas Division gain exceeds the original budgetary estimate by \$1.5M, while the Electric Division gain is currently \$1.5M more than the original forecast as well. Commissioner Roman indicated that he reviewed the financials and they looked great. Commissioner Rivera asked if money was put away for next year's capital projects. Mr. Kline indicated in the affirmative, between net income and depreciation, money is put aside to fund capital projects.

B. Informational Items:

- a) Utility Issues was presented and accepted by the MLB.
- b) Utility News/Pulseine Articles were presented.
- c) Utility Courses Update was presented

VIII. OLD BUSINESS:

- a) COVID-19 Update. The Manager provided an update that as of late September, the Department generally continues to operate as it had during the previous couple of months. Terminations due to non-payment remain on hold and our outreach efforts via our website and Facebook steer customers to our Customer Service group, who continues to coach affected customers toward budget and payment plans. Our coworkers, being providers of essential services, have continued to work throughout the pandemic, providing uninterrupted service for our customers. The Manager indicated WG+E will allow IBEW employees to carry extra two week's vacation time into next year. There are a number of employees that put off taking vacation due to COVID-19 restrictions and the Department does not want to see large numbers of employees take vacation at the end of the year, which may lead to short staffing. Commissioner Flaherty inquired if WG+E could buy out a number of unused weeks of vacation. The Manager indicated it's something he could look at, but it has not been offered to the IBEW employees at this time. The Manager further indicated that an accommodation, similar to that offered by the City, is being offered to employees with school children, in the event a schedule modification is needed to care for their school-aged children during the pandemic. Due to COVID concerns and the coming of flu season WG+E is encouraging every employee receive a flu shot. For the past decade, the Department has offered a flu clinic for employees and their family members. Last year only 26 employees got flu shots during WG+E's clinic. In order to incentivize larger participation this year, 4 hours of time off was offered to employees who got their flu shot at WG+E clinic. . As was discussed earlier during the meeting, after consultation with the Superintendent of Schools, the Department committed to fund the purchase of nearly \$3,400 worth of school supplies needed to kick off the school year. The Department also committed \$15,000 after discovering a fundraising effort was being held to expand internet access to unserved students in low-income households. In return for these contributions, WG+E marketing staff will work with the WPS to expand our marketing presence within their facilities.
- b) MLB Governance Training - The Manager indicated a training session has been scheduled for October 28th from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m. The trainer is traveling in from Colorado, and as long as Colorado remains a low risk state, it will be an in person training. If anything changes the trainer will be able to conduct the training remotely training.
- c) The Chairman asked if the long term plan for Whip City Fiber will be provided in the future. The Manager indicated a new 10 year plan is being developed and will be presented in November. What will be presented is not an update of the former plan, but rather the plans looking forward from where Whip City Fiber is currently positioned.

IX. NEW BUSINESS:

- a) **Westfield Public Schools Internet** – Discussed during public participation.
- b) **Candidate Search Process** – The Chairman indicated the Board should start discussing the process to replace the Manager upon his retirement. Commissioner Kelleher indicated it is proper to have the full Board involved in the process, which had occurred last time. The first step will be to set out the criteria. It was requested that the Manager forward all the Board members a job description, advertisements and criteria from the last manager search. The Chairman indicated that the decision as to which candidate meets the qualifications would be decided by the MLB not HR as occurred last time. The Chairman indicated we should start looking at the process. Commissioner Kelleher indicated that he concurred with the Chairman that the decision as to which candidates meet the criteria should be decided by the Board. It was requested that this matter be kept on the agenda.

X. EXECUTIVE SESSION.

On the motion of Commissioner Flaherty, seconded by Commissioner Rivera and on the basis of a roll call it was:

VOTED: To adjourn the regular meeting of the Municipal Light Board meeting and enter into executive session for the purpose of discussing trade secrets and competitively sensitive information the disclosure of which will adversely affect its ability to conduct business in relation to other entities making, selling or distributing electric power and energy and discussing the purchase, exchange, lease or value of real property in that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of WG+E, as noted on the agenda, and to reconvene the Regular Session after adjournment from Executive Session.

Renaudette	"aye"
Liptak	"aye"
Flaherty	"aye"
Sacco	"aye"
Roman	"aye"
Kelleher	"aye"
Rivera	"aye"

Motion passed 7-0. 0 absent

Chairman Sacco stated that the Municipal Light Board would be entering into executive session for the purpose of discussing trade secrets and competitively sensitive information the disclosure of which will adversely affect its ability to conduct business in relation to other entities making, selling or distributing electric power and energy and discussing the purchase, exchange, lease or value of

real property in that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of WG+E, as noted on the agenda, and would reconvene the Regular Session after adjournment from Executive Session.

The meeting recessed at 8:24 p.m.

The meeting reconvened at 8:47 p.m. following the Executive Session.

On motion by Commissioner Flaherty, seconded by Commissioner Kelleher, it was unanimously:

VOTED: To ratify and confirm all positive votes taken in Executive Session.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

On the motion of Commissioner Flaherty, seconded by Commissioner Roman, it was unanimously:

VOTED: To adjourn the regular session of the Municipal Light Board meeting.

Chairman Sacco declared the regular session portion of the meeting adjourned at 8:48 p.m.

A TRUE RECORD.

Attest:


Robert C. Sacco, Chairman

**Documents Presented at
 REGULAR SESSION October 7, 2020**

Municipal Light Board Regular Session Meeting Minutes – September 2, 2020			
Municipal Light Board Executive Session Meeting Minutes – September 2, 2020			
Acknowledgement – Cummington Whip City Fiber Customer	Alan Weisman	August 30, 2020	
Acknowledgement – Genesis Spiritual Life & Conference Center	Liz Walz, Executive Director	September 4, 2020	
Acknowledgement – Stanley Park	Robert C. McKean, Managing Director	September 23, 2020	
Acknowledgement – Westfield Pickle Ball, Westfield Little League	Scott LaBombard	September 23, 2020	
2021 MLB Commission Meeting Schedule	Anthony J. Contrino, General Manager	October 7, 2020	Regulatory & Governmental Affairs Gas/Electric Regulatory Issues, RGA-1.2
Quarterly Powerline Publication – Fall 2020	Anthony J. Contrino, General Manager		
Customer Satisfaction Survey Results	Lisa Stowe, Marketing and Communications Specialist	October 7, 2020	Communications/CS/CA Customer Satisfaction Assessment – CCA-2.1
Westfield Warm – Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) FY21	A. Paton, Customer Accounts/Collections Manager	September 14, 2020	Financial Low Income Customer Assistance Programs F 8.2
Westfield Gas & Electric 2020/2021 Energy Outlook	Anthony J. Contrino, General Manager	October 7, 2020	
Coordination with City Departments	Michael S. Lee, Operations Manager	October 7, 2020	Communications Communications/Customer Service/Community Affairs
NEPPA Joint Insurance Report	Timothy Fouche, Accounting Manager	October 7, 2020	Financial Annual Collective Purchasing Program F-3.1
August 2020 Financial Report	T. Fouche, Accounting Manager	October 7, 2020	Financial Annual & Quarterly Reports
Utility Issues	John W. Welch	October 7, 2020	Regulatory & Governmental Affairs Gas/Electric Regulatory Issues, RGA-1.4; RGA1.5
Utility News/Pulse Line	Beth Burns, HR Coordinator/Records Manager	October 7, 2020	Communications/Customer Service/ Community Affairs Media Relations – CCA-1.6
Utility Course Update 2020 Seminars/Workshops	Beth Burns, HR Coordinator/Records Manager	October 7, 2020	Administration and Organization WG+E Training & Development, AO-3.6
COVID-19 Update	Anthony J. Contrino, General Manager	October 7, 2020	Administration and Organization Emergency Situation Management, AO-4.3